

## MILLENNIALS AT WORK – INSIGHTS INTO FLEXIBLE WORK AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE AS PERCEIVED BY MILLENNIALS

Examining the Perceived Influence of Flexible Work on the Work-Life Balance of Millennials

Iina Laine

International Business  
Bachelor's Thesis  
Supervisor: Russell Warhurst  
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Aalto University  
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### **Objectives**

The main objectives of this study were to explore the attitudes of Millennials regarding work-flexibility and work-life balance. This study also attempts to examine the perceived influence of flexible work on the work-life balance of Millennials.

### **Summary**

Semi-structured interviews with employees from two different companies were conducted for the purposes of this study. All interviewees belong to the Millennial generation and are provided flexible work arrangements. The interviews focused on the perspectives and experiences of the employees regarding flexible work arrangements as well as the influence of flexibility on their work-life balance.

### **Conclusions**

It appears that Millennials value flexible work arrangements regardless of how often they make use of the provided flexibility. Furthermore, several interviewees stated that maintaining a good work-life balance was important for them. In terms of boundary permeability and flexibility, two distinct opinions emerged. Some employees preferred to maintain a more fixed boundary between work and leisure whereas others did not mind performing small work tasks in their spare time.

**Key words:** *millennials, work-life balance, flexible working hours, flexibility*

**Language:** English

**Grade:**

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ABSTRACT

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Background

The contemporary business environment is said to be dynamic and challenging because of digitalization and globalization. As competition has become more intense in several industries, rapid adjustment and response to the changes in the business environment is often required. Also, the efficient use of resources has become increasingly important in order to gain competitive advantage and remain profitable. These phenomena have influenced the employees of several companies as they are offered flexible working arrangements in order to become more efficient, productive and satisfied with their jobs (Sonier, 2012; Grant et al., 2013).

As a result of phenomena such as globalization, increasing amount of companies engage in international activities. For instance, it is rather common that some work tasks require participation of employees from different countries and time zones. Flexible work arrangements enable employees from multiple time zones to work simultaneously with certain tasks which might not be possible within traditional fixed office hours. Indeed, work flexibility has provided several companies the opportunity to use their workforce more efficiently.

Simultaneously, changes in ways of living and attitudes in several cultures has caused work to become less central in the lives of many people. Hence, issues such as well-being and family have become increasingly important. Nevertheless, several studies indicate that particularly knowledge workers are often expected to be accessible outside of their regular office hours, and the line between professional and personal life has become more blurred (Golden, 2001; Pedersen & Lewis, 2012; Grant et al., *ibid.*).

Furthermore, a new generation is currently entering the workforce which may influence several businesses worldwide. In fact, it is estimated that in 10 years, 75% of the workforce would consist of Millennials, the largest generation since Baby Boomers (Johnson, 2015). It is argued that the Millennial generation would have significantly different values and expectations compared to previous generations. For

example, they are said to value good work-life balance and prefer clearer boundaries between personal and professional lives (Cogin, 2012; DeVaney, 2015).

## 1.2. Research Problem

Indeed, there is a slight controversy in the results of several studies considering the influence of flexible work on employee work-life balance; some studies indicate that flexible work enhances work-life balance (Kelly & Moen, 2007; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015 Moheet, 2016), whereas others suggest that it might also have several shortcomings (Golden, 2001; McCloskey, 2015). In general, flexible work seems to improve work-life balance, especially in terms of decreasing work-family conflict (Galea et al., 2014). However, there are a lack of studies which would focus on the perceived influence flexible work has on the work-life balance of the Millennials for most studied samples consist of married couples or parents from the previous generations.

## 1.3. Research Questions

In order to address the phenomena described above, the following research questions were formed:

1. How do millennials perceive a good work-life balance in their lives?
2. To what extent do millennials value good work-life balance?
3. How do millennials perceive flexible work arrangements?
4. To what extent does work flexibility influence the perceptions of work-life balance to millennials?

## 1.4. Research Objectives

Furthermore, the aim of this thesis is to:

1. Explore the attitudes of Millennials regarding work flexibility
2. Explore the attitudes of Millennials towards work-life balance
3. Examine the perceived influence of flexible work arrangements on work-life balance to Millennials

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section, some of the major studies and findings will be discussed and analyzed in order to reach an understanding of the already existing ideas and concepts in this field. These studies will establish a foundation on which the results of this thesis will be compared to. This literature review will first present the most common definitions for millennials, flexible work, and work-life balance. Second, themes and theories that have emerged in research thus far will be analyzed. Finally, the aim and purpose of the thesis will be discussed.

### 2.1. Millennials

A generation is often defined as people who were born within a certain range of birth years. Also, several studies suggest that the values of each generation differ from other generations because of different life experiences they face in their youth. For instance, the Millennial generation is often defined as people who were born between the early 1980s and late 1990s (Levenson, 2010; Cogin, 2012; Schullery 2013). The events shaping the values of this generation include the rapid development of technology, pop culture, the emergence of social media, and the financial crisis.

#### 2.1.1. Generational Differences

There has been significant amount of discussion regarding the allegedly significantly different values and perceptions of the Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y. In fact, it is often argued that this generation is entitled, self-centered, and impatient (Schullery, 2013; DeVaney, 2015). Tapscott (2009) cited in Schullery (2013: 254) even claimed that there might be physical differences between the Millennials and previous generations because many people in this generation have been exposed to technology since they were children which has shaped their brains, enabling them to process and remember information more quickly.

It appears, however, that many studies have failed to prove any significant difference between Millennials and other generations (Levenson, 2010; Twenge, 2010). DeVaney (2015) describes Baby boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) as hardworking, goal-oriented, and self-reliant which is claimed to differ from the mindset of the Millennials. However, Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979) is



also believed to have the mindset of preferring leisure over work. In fact, since 1990, developing technology has created the phenomenon of flexible work, enabling the Generation X to work from their homes (Golden, 2001). It is predicted that Millennials will continue this trend because they have watched their parents 'work long hours, only to fall victim to corporate downsizing, frequent layoffs, and high divorce rates' and have decided to choose 'life over work' (Loughlin & Barling, 2001 cited in Ng, et al., 2010 : 282).

In addition, Twenge (2010) and Schullery (2013) suggest that Millennials do not have any more altruistic or intrinsic values than previous generations. Also, it is proposed that extrinsic values, such as valuing higher salary, have retreated from the Generation X even though they appear to remain more important to Millennials than Baby Boomers. Another common belief is that Millennials would seek meaningful jobs. However, the study results did not support this either. Finally, it was found that the Millennials might in fact be more satisfied with their jobs, believe in job security and have fewer intentions to leave the company than the Generation X.

Hence, it could be argued that the proclivity to prefer flexibility and to 'work to live' might be a result of technology advancements and the change in lifestyles rather than the allegedly entitled and self-centered mindset of the Millennial generation. Also, the shift from traditional, bounded career types might be caused by changes in the business environment.

#### 2.1.2. Limitations of Multigenerational Studies

There are several limitations in the research that has been conducted thus far. First, many studies examining the generational differences in the workplace are done without acknowledging the differences in opinions caused by different life-cycles. When examining generational differences, age should be held constant which could be done with time-lag or longitudinal research designs (Levenson, 2010; Twenge, 2010; Cogin, 2012). In addition, many studies also fail to acknowledge differences caused by the cultural diversity (Cogin, *ibid.*).

Second, generations should not be generalized for the differences between individuals can be significant (Ng, et al. 2010). As DeVaney (2015) states, there might be differences even between younger and older millennials: Millennials who were born between 1988-1992 entered the job market during the recession in 2007, whereas millennials born after 1992 might have still been at school which might shape the values of these two subgroups.

Finally, in terms of research methods, several studies have used self-reported surveys, which might have been influenced by social desirability and response-set biases. Also, most of the Millennials who participated in the studies were college students who had little or no work experience which might explain their unrealistic expectations (Ng et al., 2010).

## 2.2. Flexible Work Arrangements

Most studies propose at least two different types of flexible work in their research, flexitime and flexiplace (Shockley & Allen, 2012; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015; Thompson et al. 2015). Some studies also identify two additional types, part-time employment, and job rotation (Hayman, 2009; Hayman, 2010). For the purpose of this lit review, the focus will be on the former two, flexitime and flexiplace.

In essence, employees with flexitime schedules are enabled to decide their working hours. The employer might limit this in some way, such as requiring the presence of the employee at the office during certain hours of the day. In turn, flexiplace, telework or telecommuting enables the employee to work wherever they want, such as from their own house through telecommuting systems (Smith, 2010).

Several studies have identified flexible working arrangements as one of the most important means to balance professional and personal lives (Smith, 2010). In addition, several studies have found that Millennials want flexible work schedules which enable them to work in their own pace and free of supervision (Twenge, 2010; Schullery, 2013). Even though flexible work is becoming increasingly common within modern economies, the demand still exceeds supply (Golden, 2001). Indeed, Sonier

(2012) and (Golden, *ibid.*) suggest that it could be critical for companies to promote flexible work arrangements to attract and retain Generation X and Y talent.

Moreover, Hill et al. (2008) cited in Galea (2014 : 1091) proposed that perceived flexibility significantly decreased 'family-to-work' conflict, and stress. Also, as double-income couples have become increasingly common, parents in several countries are dependent on flexible work arrangements in order to combine their professional lives with their personal lives. In fact, it is said that employees with stable work hours are more likely to be dissatisfied with their inflexible job schedules. Hence, they could be more inclined to switch to more flexible jobs, such as part-time jobs, which may decrease their earning and other benefits (Golden, 2001).

Similarly, it is claimed that flexible work schedules would improve employee work-life balance for it gives workers more control of their schedules (Kelly & Moen, 2007; Ronen, 1981 cited in Hayman, 2009: 330; Kelly et al., 2011; Grant, 2013). However, several studies have discovered that flexible work designs might make workweeks unpredictable and less stable compared to inflexible job schedules. Moreover, it is said that full-time workers with flexible work arrangements often work three or more additional hours weekly in comparison with those who have inflexible schedules (Golden, 2001).

In many cultures, longer hours are viewed as a sign of diligence and good work ethic, and a way for employees to earn promotions and respect within the workplace. In fact, several employees studied by Golden (*ibid.*), stated that there was a social pressure related to the number of working hours at their workplace. Particularly flexiplace schedules are viewed as more career-damaging compared to flexitime because the employee is not physically present at the office under manager supervision.

#### 2.2.1. Differences in Attitudes towards Flexible Work

As a study by Kelly & Moen (2007) suggests, flexible work arrangements should be embedded in the company identity and implemented consistently. The decision regarding which employees are granted flexible work schedules are often subjective

decisions of managers. Employees who perceived the reasoning of flexible work arrangements unfair reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with their jobs (Galea et al., 2014).

Finally, a study conducted by DeVaney (2015) suggests that, in terms of work flexibility, there might be two viewpoints among Millennials: 'digital freedom crusaders', who prefer to work whenever and wherever they want and 'office traditionalists', who prefer stable office hours and value the social aspect of work. Another study provides the concept of 'leisure at work' which implies that because Millennials seek fluidity between work and leisure, they should be allowed to, for instance, 'check their social media accounts' in the middle of the workday (Schullery, 2013).

#### 2.2.2. The Boundary Theory

"Boundary theory" is mentioned in several studies examining flexible work arrangements. Boundary theory explores the human need to establish and preserve boundaries in their daily life. Simultaneously, however; boundaries create challenges in terms of moving from one role to another. According to the boundary theory, interrole conflict is the result of one's inability to meet competing demands. It is suggested that there exists costs between sustaining and transferring between roles. These costs emerge if the transition between roles is either too difficult or too easy: Too difficult transition results in inability to fulfill one role because of too rigid boundaries of another role whereas too easy transition leads to confusion regarding which role is the most relevant in which situation. Moreover, it is proposed that the costs of the transitions could be explored through three factors: flexibility of role boundaries, permeability of boundaries, and contrast between roles (Ashforth et al., 2000 cited in Rau & Hyland, 2002 : 114-115).

Furthermore, it is proposed that if there exist rigid boundaries between different roles, the roles are easier to separate from each other for there is 'less permeability between role boundaries' which 'minimizes role blurring and its associated costs'. However, strict boundaries result in challenges regarding the transition between roles and increases the transition costs. In contrast, greater role integration leads to more

flexible boundaries and less distinguished roles which in turn reduces the transition cost but increases the blurring of roles (Ashforth et al., 2000 cited in Rau & Hyland, 2002: 115-116).

The boundary theory claims that all employees should appreciate flexible schedules. Flexible arrangements should be beneficial especially to those employees who experience high levels of work-life conflict. However, it is suggested that even if an employee is 'experiencing high levels of role conflict', they would not view all flexible work schedules beneficial. For example, one could presume that employees with families would be more likely to use teleworking. Nevertheless, it is claimed that telecommuting could in fact create tension between family members for children and spouses might not understand to respect the boundaries of the teleworking family member (Kurland & Bailey, 1999 cited in Rau & Hyland, 2002 : 113).

### 2.2.3. Flexitime

Several studies suggest that flexitime schedules enhance employee work-life balance and well-being (Hayman, 2010; Smith, 2010; Galea et al. 2014; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015). It is said that the most beneficial work schedules for employees are those with 'short core hours, the accumulation of hours, and the ability to change schedules daily or weekly' (Olmstead and Smith, 1994 cited in Hayman, 2010 : 77).

Research by Galea et al. (2014) studied how employees with flexible working hours perceived their work-life balance. The study found that flexible working hours were appreciated both for personal and professional reasons by employees. However, the study proposes a condition to this finding; there should exist a work culture which supports flexible working hours. Particularly the support of the company management was important for the employees.

Additionally, it is said that flexible working hours enhance work-life balance when 'they are not imposed on employees by the employers' (Vandeweyer & Glorieux, 2008; cited in Galea et al. *ibid.* :1093). For parents, flexible working hours were often needed to take care of children. For employees with no children, work flexibility might

have been used to run personal errands or to avoid traffic jams while commuting to and from work (Galea et al. *ibid.*).

#### 2.2.4. Flexiplace

Flexiplace schedules have not gained as much attention in research compared to flexitime. However, it is said that flexiplace, or telecommuting, reduces commuting time, stress, role overload, and leaves more time for leisure (Kossek et al., 2006; cited in Hayman, 2010: 78). On the other hand, some studies have found that flexiplace schedules might not have any significant impact on employee work-life balance (Hayman, 2010; Grant, et al. 2013).

Several studies have found that successful flexible work schedules require support from management and the overall work culture. However, it is said that whether the employee was given the opportunity of flexiplace work schedules often depended on the job role of the employee, the level of trust afforded, and the relationship with supervisor (Galea et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2013; Hagel, 2015).

In addition, failure to effectively communicate what is required from the employee might lead to misunderstandings, and break trust. The effectiveness of telecommuting is also said to be dependent on individual skills and competencies: Some employees might get more easily distracted and lack the ability to find motivation or feel isolated at home, because they cannot socialize with their co-workers (Hagel, *ibid.*).

On the other hand, however, for instance Hayman (2010) argued that flexiplace work schedules do not decrease personal life interference with work or improve employee well-being significantly. Similarly, Grant et al. (2013) found that some employees have too much motivation to work. Hence, they might work extensive hours and neglect relationships outside of work which could eventually weaken their productivity, work-life balance and well-being (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012).

Nevertheless, some of the defects mentioned above could be overcome through training. This could enable employees to develop their skills in managing overlap

between work and home, creating schedules, and planning in advance (Grant et al. *ibid.*).

#### 2.2.5. Flexibility from the Perspective of Companies

Even though previous research suggests that flexibility provides several benefits to employees, some studies claim that the companies are the ones who benefit more from flexibility (Benach et al., 2002; cited in Dettmers et al. 2013 : 157; Zeytinoglu et al., 2009). In fact, it is even argued that flexible work arrangements allow the companies to exploit the workforce. Indeed, Zeytinoglu et al. (2009) claims that flexible work arrangements are strategic decisions which represent the interests of organizations. However, several studies have attempted to explain these conflicting results by suggesting that there exist several types of flexible work practices; capacity-oriented (or flexibility demands) and employee-oriented flexibility (or flexibility opportunities). The former serves the needs of businesses whereas the latter is considered as more employee-friendly (Höge, 2011; Hornung, Herbig & Glaser, 2008; cited in Dettmers et al., 2013 : 155).

Additionally, in some countries, such as in Finland, labor legislation is created to protect the rights of the employees. However, in some countries, like in the United States, the labor legislation is believed to favor employers. Hence, some of the differences in research findings might emerge because of differences among countries. Eventually, however, particularly in knowledge intense fields, it is often in the best interest of companies to pursue what is in the best interests of the workforce for the workforce is the most valuable asset of the company. If the flexible work arrangements compromise the well-being of the employees, it might ultimately have severe consequences to the competency of the company.

#### 2.2.6. Limitations of Flexible Work Research

There are some limitations to the research which studies flexible work schedules. Firstly, the majority of the samples studied consisted of highly educated, married couples and parents. Second, many respondents made use of flexible work schedules voluntarily. Third, the implementation of flexible working arrangements is relatively inconsistent for the execution is often based on the subjective decisions of

the company managers. Hence, the flexibility offered by different managers and companies might vary from minimal to extensive (Kelly & Moen, 2007).

Also, flexibility is often not distinguished from variability of hours through time. Employees with flexible work schedules often trade off the stability in their weekly number of working hours. Also, employees with flexible working schedules are more likely to have a variable workweek length for people with the shortest and longest working hours often have less predictable workweek compared to those with fixed schedules (Golden, 2001).

### 2.3. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to 'people spending sufficient time at their jobs while also spending adequate time on other pursuits, such as family, friends, and hobbies' (Smith, 2010 : 434). Phenomena such as digitalization, globalization and intensified competition has put pressure on companies to become more efficient. This has also reflected to employees for maintaining a good work-life balance has become more challenging as they are often required to balance multiple responsibilities simultaneously (Hayman, 2010).

At the same time, however, work-life balance has become increasingly important among workers for poor work-life balance is associated with depression, lower life and job satisfaction, and even poor physical health. Also, Smith (2010) found that good work-life balance may enhance performance and lead to more ethical decisions among Millennials.

It is said that because physical boundaries related to work and leisure have become more blurred, the importance of psychological boundaries has increased. Many researchers have studied boundary permeability (the extent to which people are physically in one role while psychologically in another) and its effect on employee work-life balance (Hayman, 2010, McCloskey, 2016). It is said that those 'with inflexible and both permeable work and home boundaries experience the highest time and strain home-work conflict' (McCloskey, 2016 : 67).



As stated above, among all generations, particularly Millennials are said to value work-life balance. In fact, it is said that Millennials seek companies who 'offer fluidity between work and play'. Perhaps because they do not currently have to balance between work and family, it is proposed that Millennials want 'leisure at work' (Ng et al., 2010: 289). Indeed, it is suggested that for this generation, work and leisure have merged into one (Schullery, 2013; Johnson, 2015). Possible causes for this change might have been the advancements of technology which has made it easy to move from one to the other (Johnson, 2015). Hence, it is argued that Millennials would respond better to rewards such as free meals, company health clubs and more vacation, instead of financial rewards. Nevertheless, the perceptions regarding work-life balance may differ significantly between individuals.

#### 2.4. Conclusion and Conceptual Framework

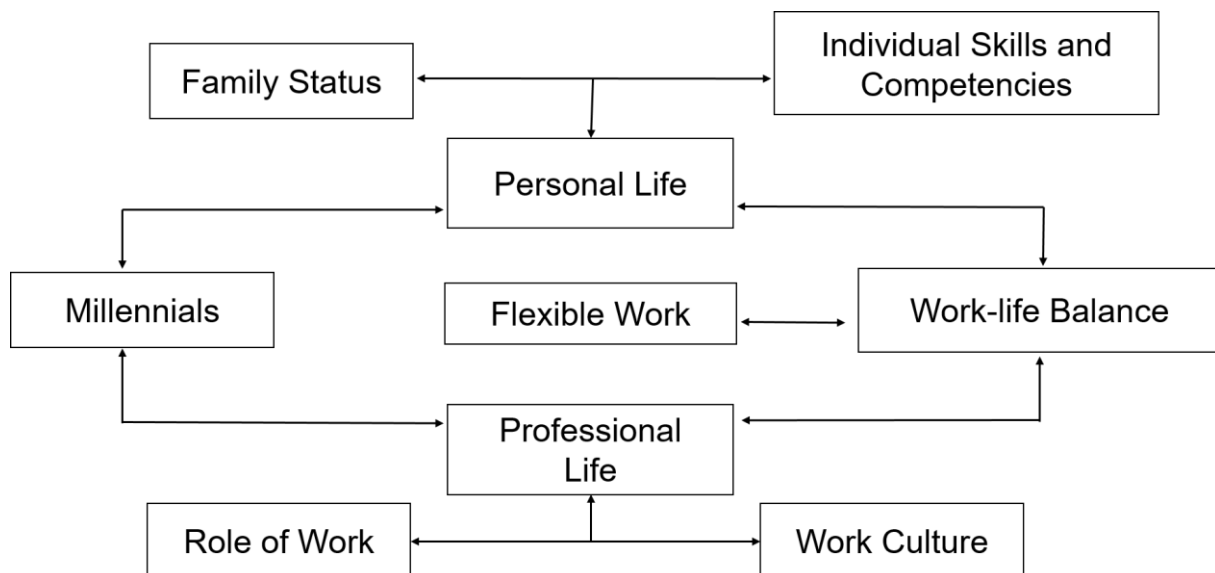
As competition has intensified in several industries, the companies need to remain dynamic in order to maintain their competitive advantage and profitability. Therefore, companies are slowly embracing flexible work programs which enable the companies to adapt their workforce to changes in the dynamic business environment. Nevertheless, this might compromise the work-life balance and wellbeing of the employees as they are expected to be accessible outside of their regular office hours, and the line between professional and personal life might become more blurred.

Indeed, there has been controversial results in terms of the influence of flexible work on employee work-life balance; Some studies propose that flexible work might compromise work-life balance (Golden, 2001; McCloskey, 2015), while the majority suggest that it usually enhances work-life balance (Kelly & Moen, 2007; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015 Moheet, 2016).

At the same time, however, work-life balance has become increasingly important among employees, the Millennials in particular. This generation is said to value leisure over financial rewards, and to seek companies that offer flexibility between professional and personal lives (Schullery, 2013). In fact, it is claimed that the Millennials would have very different values in comparison with previous generations.

It is said, for instance, that they are entitled, impatient, and have worse work-ethic. Nevertheless, several studies have failed to find significant differences in the Millennial mindset.

Below, a conceptual framework is presented based on the discussion and analysis of this Literature Review.



The three main themes examined in this thesis, Millennials, flexible work and work-life balance, are located in the core of the framework. Previous studies claim that maintaining a good work-life balance is important for the Millennial generation. Good work-life balance is often defined as a point which can be achieved when one's professional and personal lives are in balance. Some of the issues influencing personal life are family status and individual skills and competencies which are frequently mentioned in existing research. Regarding professional life, it is said that the implementation of the flexible work arrangements has an influence on how employees perceive flexibility. As discussed above, flexible work arrangements should be embedded in the company identity and implemented consistently.

Moreover, as proposed by already existing studies, flexible work arrangements might have an influence on the boundaries between one's professional and personal lives. As stated above, it is claimed that flexible work blurs the boundary between work and leisure. However, it is also believed that the Millennial generation would like to

maintain a clear boundary between the two dimensions. Finally, the influence of flexible work and boundary permeability on the work-life balance of employees, as discussed above in this section, is presented in the framework.

### 3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This section describes the primary research conducted for this thesis and discusses the data collection and data analysis procedure. In addition to the primary research conducted, secondary sources, which were briefly discussed in the Review of Literature section, will be further compared and contrasted with the findings of the primary research in the Discussion section below.

#### 3.1 Sample

Before contacting the potential interviewees, some primary criteria were created: First, all interviewees should be born after the year of 1980, hence they would belong to the Millennial generation. Second, all participants ought to have some flexible work arrangements in use currently in order to be able to describe their experiences and thoughts related to the phenomena discussed in this thesis. Third, to reach a theoretical saturation of data, the interviewees should be in different life stages and have diverse family compositions. Finally, all of the employees should preferably be knowledge workers for in the discussion section, the findings of this research will be compared and contrasted to some existing studies many of which have focused on knowledge workers.

Employees who fulfilled the criteria were contacted through e-mail. Thirteen employees from two different companies were chosen on a voluntary basis. The interviewees were provided the possibility to participate in the interviews vis-à-vis or remotely per phone or Skype. Ultimately, four interviews were conducted through phone or Skype and nine interviews vis-à-vis at the company premises.

Of the employees interviewed, five were female and eight were male. Furthermore, three men had young children. The interviewees were categorized as being married, cohabiting or single. In addition to varied length of employment, the employees occupied diverse positions within the company. In terms of nationality, twelve

participants were Finnish and one was Indian. There is a table which summarizes this information in Appendix 1.

The first company, Company A, is based in Finland. Company A provides pension insurances for employees in Finland. The second company in turn, Company B, is headquartered in Ireland but has operations in several other countries. Company B provides services in multiple fields, including consulting and technology.

### 3.2. Data collection

Qualitative research was chosen as the research method in order to examine perceptions, feelings and values from the lives of employees who use flexible work arrangements. Indeed, the aim of this study is to gain better understanding regarding the motivations of the use of flexible work arrangements and the influences of flexible work on one's work-life balance. Furthermore, there is a lack of research from this field in Finland. Hence, gathering personal experiences and thoughts provides valuable insights which may help to understand the phenomena discussed in this thesis and provide hypotheses to be tested in further research.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted for this research for they allow for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as relevant by already existing studies and the researcher. Indeed, the possible influences of flexibility on one's work-life balance and life in general is a complex matter as there are a number of ways to experience and use flexible work arrangements. Moreover, semi-structured interviews allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms. Finally, semi-structured interviews also consist of certain key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allow the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail.

Consequently, thirteen semi-structured interviews were carried out with each interviewee at a suitable setting selected by the interviewees. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in Finnish for the majority of the participants spoke Finnish as their native language and were not as comfortable with conducting the

interview in English. These interviews were then translated from Finnish to English by the author with the aim to preserve the meaning and main ideas of the interviews. One interview was conducted in English for the interviewee did not speak Finnish. On average, the interviews lasted 15-25 minutes.

A question list related to the topics relevant to the research objectives was created to guide the interviews. The question list was established according to previous studies and included the following topics: flexible work arrangements, perceived importance of flexibility, work-life balance, work-life conflict, boundary permeability, use of flexibility and flexibility within work culture. These topics emerged from several existing studies and findings in the field. Below, four sample questions from the interviews conducted for the purposes of this study are presented. The themes which the questions were aimed to address are in parenthesis after each sample question.

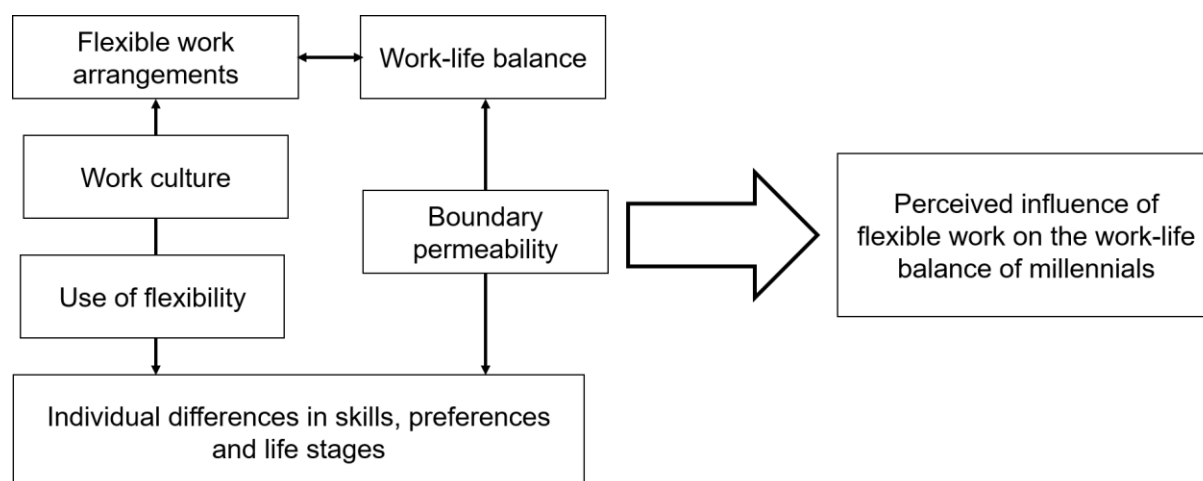
- 1: What does work-life balance mean to you? (work-life balance)
- 2: How are flexible work arrangements implemented at your company? (flexibility within work culture)
- 3: How have you experienced flexible schedules at your workplace? (perceived importance of flexibility)
- 4: To what extent do you prefer boundaries between your professional and your personal life and why? (boundary permeability)

### 3.3. Data Analysis

For the purposes of this research, a qualitative approach has been applied using thematic analysis, based on the sourcebook given by Miles and Huberman (1994). With the permission of the interviewees, all thirteen interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim soon after the interview had taken place, and analyzed theoretically. Thematic analysis was applied to examine the themes across the collected data regarding the three research areas included in this research; flexible work, work-life balance and millennials. The themes were created by searching for similarities and relationships in the data gathered from the interviews.

Secondly, open coding, which refers to the identification of initial key concepts within the data, was employed. The objective is to concentrate on the meaning of particular words and phrases the respondents have chosen and view their interpretations theoretically. Third, the codes were grouped into categories and organized to a table for the purposes of the data analysis. Also, a thematic framework was created according to the themes that emerged from the data: all the themes on the left in Figure 1. might influence how the employee perceives flexible work arrangements and their impact on his or her work-life balance.

Figure 1. illustrates the main themes which emerged from the data.



## 4. FINDINGS

### 4.1. Flexible Work Arrangements

Generally, the perceptions of the employees regarding flexible work arrangements were relatively positive. A meta-data matrix was made to describe the benefits of flexible work arrangements as mentioned by the interviewees and to compare the experienced benefits between female and male respondents (Table 1.). Some of the most commonly experienced benefits were the ability to make personal plans more freely, the freedom to decide when one starts and ends a workday, and increased motivation to work.

Furthermore, one of the benefits mentioned by several employees was the fact that flexibility enables them to work when they feel most motivated to work. For example, a cohabiting woman without children stated:

*“...I like to... when I have a lot of ‘good energy’, I tend to work more because there will be those days when I don’t want to work that much, so then it’s nice to work six-hour days because we have the opportunity with these time cards... for example, I tend to work more in the winter when it’s dark and there’s not that many things to do in your free time anyway, so I try to gather extra hours [in the winter] and then work six-hour days almost the entire summer”. (#3)*

In terms of flexible working hours, the main benefits mentioned by the interviewees were increased motivation, ease of making personal plans, and working reduced hours occasionally. The employees who had young children named issues considering the performing of caring duties as one of the main benefits of flexible work arrangements. Moreover, a married woman without children who was the sole non-Finnish respondent, stated that flexibility enabled her to take care of a sick family member, or even change location according to the location of her family member (e.g. the work location of her husband changed from one city to another).

Many interviewees stated that they do not telework often because they feel, for example, that they have better equipment in use at the office. Furthermore, several interviewees appreciated the social aspect of work and thought that one receives help more easily at the office. Nevertheless, the interviewees agreed that telework is very convenient at times. For example, few employees stated that telecommuting enables to do work that requires more attention. Also, teleworking was viewed as convenient in case one wanted to spend a long weekend, for example, at their summer cottage.

There were few differences between male and female respondents. Both men and women stated that flexible schedules create a sense that the employer trusts the employees to do their work well and in time. However, three men and one woman

stated that they appreciated the fact that supervisors were not hovering over them at work. Also, two men experienced that one of the benefits of flexible schedules is the tendency to measure performance on the basis of results and quality of work instead of quantity. In contrast, all four female interviewees and one male interviewee thought that flexible schedules increase their overall well-being.



Table 1.

Interviewee	improved ability to cope with work tasks	increased well-being	increased motivation	sense of responsibility / trust	sense of caring / support	results-oriented focus	easier to schedule personal plans	occasional day-offs / reduced hours	less stress about being in time to work	ease of performing caring duties	better focus when teleworking	reduced commuting time when teleworking
1	X	X	X				X	X	X			
2		X	X	X			X		X	X	X	X
3		X	X	X			X	X			X	
4			X				X	X				
5			X	X		X	X	X		X		
6			X	X		X	X	X		X		
7			X				X					
8			X	X			X					
9				X			X	X	X			
10		X	X	X			X	X	X			
11	X						X	X				
12			X	X			X	X				
13		X	X		X		X	X		X		

Related to the individual perceptions of flexible work arrangements with regard to work-life balance, five main themes were established in relation with the interviews. The first theme addresses the purpose of flexible work arrangements. The second, the third and the fourth themes address aspects regarding the perceptions of the relationship between work and leisure. Finally, the fifth theme portrays the influence the companies have on the experiences of the employees. The five themes are presented in Table 2 below with illustrative quotations from the interviews:

Table 2.

Theme	Illustrative quote	Participants with similar views
Use of Flexibility	<i>"I use it [flexible schedules] weekly... Often for something like dentist appointments, of course there aren't that many but they often are right in the middle of the day or if you have some urgent need to go to the bank or something else... And then I try to work from home at least once a week... We have cubicles at the office so the noise and all is... when you telework it's much more calm and you can do things that require more attention..." (#3)</i>	6 participants (62%)
Work-life Balance	<i>"Well, for sure it means that there'd be time left for hobbies... so not being at the office from early in the morning to late in the night... especially since I have a small child now, there should be time for her too, and of course there should be time for myself... so it [balancing work and life] is maybe more easy now that I work here... compared to the previous company I worked for." (#2)</i>	12 participants (92%)
Work-life Conflict	<i>"Umm... there hasn't really been any... there's no... maybe it's because I'm in this life stage that I don't have kids or anything like that so there hasn't been any conflict so far... maybe because you have this quite a free lifestyle, there's not really issues like that... so you can get more out of these flexible arrangements." (#9)</i>	8 participants (62%)
Boundary Permeability	<i>"Of course, it would be better if I didn't need to do it [work at home] but it's the nature of this work... But I wouldn't say I've had any issues with it and there haven't been any surprises really... I... I wouldn't say that I have a problem with it... I'm a dad at home and clients come first at work, I'd say that they can be separated from each other quite well in the end." (#5)</i>	8 participants (62%)
Flexibility within Work Culture	<i>"...Basically, if the company is flexible the employee is also flexible, like if you need to work longer someday, then you work longer but you can then leave earlier on the next day, so people do understand that..." (#10)</i>	10 participants (77%)

#### 4.1.1. Use of Flexibility

This paragraph describes the perceived importance of flexibility as well as how often the interviewees use flexible arrangements. The employees were divided into three distinct groups according to their family statuses: (i) parents with young children, (ii) employees with partner and without children, (iii) employees without partner and without children. A central key aspect that emerged is that the employees did not perceive flexibility important as they were planning their career or applying for their current position. However, several interviewees stated that after entering the workforce, flexibility had become more important. Indeed, several employees stated that if there would not be flexible arrangements, their work motivation would decrease.

Furthermore, it appears that for interviewees with young children, flexibility has become a necessity. Often it was the factor that enabled both parents to pursue careers. These respondents use flexible work schedules mainly to perform caring responsibilities such as taking children to kindergarten. Essentially, flexible working hours enable them to combine the roles of professional life with those of personal life.

Simultaneously, other interviewees viewed flexible working hours as an extra benefit. They often use flexible work arrangements for practical issues, such as going to the bank, or reduce stress in case of traffic jams while going to work. Even though these employees do not consider flexibility as a necessity, they think that flexible work arrangements make their life easier in general. Furthermore, these employees often stated that flexible schedules enable them to work more when they are motivated and work reduced hours, for instance, during summertime.

Regarding several childless respondents with or without partner, two main perspectives emerged: some respondents stated that flexible work arrangements were common in the field they work whereas some viewed flexibility as an extra benefit. Interviewees who viewed flexible work arrangements as relatively self-evident in the field did not experience an increase in work motivation as a result of flexibility. However, these interviewees stated that in case they would not be granted flexibility anymore, their motivation would decrease significantly.

## 4.2. Work-Life Balance

The interviewees stated that good work-life balance was an important aspect in their lives. Furthermore, to many interviewees, a good work-life balance meant that there would be a time during which one can forget work matters and recover mentally from work. However, to many participants, the concept of work-life balance seemed to be rather flexible. As the company provides the employees with flexible work arrangements, the employees understand that sometimes the work day may be longer but one might in turn receive more free time on the next day. The employees did not mind this arrangement as they could use the flexibility when they needed to and thought it was only fair to be flexible in turn when the company needed it.

### 4.2.1. Work-Life Conflict

The majority of the interviewees had not experienced any conflicts between work and leisure which would have disturbed their lives. For the employees with young children, work-life conflict emerged often in the form of picking up a child from school or kindergarten in the middle of the day. However, these issues did not occur on a weekly basis but were rather experienced as exceptions.

### 4.2.2. Boundary Permeability

There emerged two differing opinions regarding the boundary between the professional and personal lives of the employees. Several interviewees stated that they would ideally prefer to keep a fixed boundary between work and leisure. Nevertheless, several employees stated that they often performed small work tasks in their free time but they did not mind doing this informal extra work in their current life stage. A single man without children said:

*“Personally, I wouldn't mind [working during leisure], I don't think it would impact my life that much... My guess is that the older generation isn't interested in checking their e-mails after the workday or having their phone there all the time whereas for us [younger people] the phone is there anyway and you check it constantly so it doesn't matter whether there's an e-mail or not, you'll check it anyway.” (#4)*

However, particularly employees with young children desired to have a more rigid boundary between work and leisure. All three parents experienced that working in the evening would be relatively difficult because there are young children around who do not yet understand to respect the boundaries of a working parent.

There might be a few reasons why the perceptions of the employees were different. First, young children create limitations in terms of working in one's free time. Also, many interviewees with young children wanted to focus on their families in their free time. However, employees who do not have caring duties might be able to do work even after the workday because of their freer way of life. It appeared that the work done in the evenings was voluntary and not seen as working overtime. Thus, the second possible reason is that many interviewees were hired relatively recently and had been with the company for a relatively short time period. Indeed, several participants who stated that they did not mind replying to emails after the workday might feel that they need to show their value within the company, or they might aspire to advance in their careers in the future.

A comparative matrix (Table 3.) was established to compare and contrast the experiences and thoughts of employees with and without caring duties:

Table 3.

Interviewee	Civil status	Small children	General impression	Use of flexibility	Work-life balance	Boundary permeability	Conflict between work and life
2	Married	Yes	"Well... <b>it does make it easier to plan your day-to-day life...</b> like if I need to pick up a child from daycare in the middle of the day, I can leave and finish my work in the evening."	"I often come to work at the same time every day since <b>the entire family wakes up at the same time so I always take the same train...</b> "	"Well... not being at the office from early in the morning to late in the night... especially since I have a small child now, <b>there should be time for the child too, and of course there should be time for myself...</b> so it [balancing work and life] is maybe more easy now that I work here..."	" <b>Personally, I like it [maintaining a fixed boundary between work and leisure] ...</b> 'cause you can change your mindset off from work... you just need to pick up your phone and read one e-mail so you instantly start thinking about that work issue... and the child doesn't like it either if I'm constantly checking my phone..."	"Umm... Well... Well, that's probably the only thing like <b>if I need to read an e-mail at home and the child is there...</b> They'll notice instantly when you pick up your phone..."
5	Married	Yes	"That you get to be the master of your own calendar is... it's a really cool thing. I didn't have that opportunity in my previous job and now I do, so <b>I really appreciate the fact that I can plan my own schedule.</b> "	"...if I've been travelling for several days and not around at home I'll leave earlier from work and pick the kids up from kindergarten and school. Sometimes... I take the kids to the kindergarten and go to the office one or two hours later... <b>Family is my priority in life and the main reason I use flexible working hours.</b> "	" <b>That work issues wouldn't follow me to home</b> and that... it's that when I leave from work and come home, the kids are screaming 'Dad, it's time to play!' so then no, it's not nice if you're constantly thinking about work..."	"Of course, it would be better if I didn't need to do it [work at home] but it's the nature of this work... But I wouldn't say I've had any issues with it and there haven't been any surprises really... <b>I'm a dad at home and clients come first at work, I'd say that they can be separated from each other quite well in the end.</b> "	"Quite rarely... sometimes if there's a few e-mails or something like that, I might open my laptop... there's no harm to anyone if I send one or two messages... But <b>overall, I work rarely on my free-time at home.</b> "
3	Single	No	" <b>I feel that the employer trusts the staff and employees</b> when they offer these flexible schedules. It means that they want to engage and motivate us as employees to do our job well."	"I use it [flexible schedules] weekly... Often for something like dentist appointments... or <b>if you have some urgent need to go to the bank or something else... And then I try to work from home at least once a week...</b> when you telework it's much calmer and you can do things that require more attention..."	"Umm... to me, it pretty much means that there's that kind of <b>free time which has nothing to do with work so you can recover</b> , not necessarily physically but that you have some time of your own so your brains can switch off from work, that's really important..."	"... <b>I would like to maintain a very clear boundary somehow</b> , like when the workday is over then it's actually over and I wouldn't want to do any work stuff after that."	"Umm... not really, no... maybe it's more like <b>if something has happened in your personal life</b> , it might bother you at work sometimes but not the other way around..."
9	Cohabiting	No	"One positive thing is that <b>it's easier to schedule time if you have some plans</b> or something like that... I don't see anything negative in that... that I have more freedom at work and so on."	"Well maybe... <b>sometimes the days tend to be a bit longer and you gather extra hours</b> which is good, like a time card system so you can accumulate extra hours... so you can then take some Friday off or something like that..."	"...even though you would have more work so then... <b>you still have free-time but I don't mind if there's more work if the employer is flexible too...</b> sometimes you might want to have a vacation or take one Friday off so... they [the employer] agree to that in turn then..."	"...maybe sometimes it feels that it [having strict boundaries] would be nice... maybe it's sometimes a bit hard to leave work problems at work... if... since they get mixed up a little... but to me, <b>the overall impression is positive when they [work and leisure] blend a little.</b> "	"Well... It's a bad habit... to check e-mails with my phone or iPad at home... But I don't mind because it's just the thing that... when you have that flexibility I don't mind to check or answer to e-mails in the evenings."

#### 4.3. Flexibility within the Company Culture

In both companies, flexible arrangements were not dependent on the position the employee has within the company. Instead, flexibility was embedded in the company culture. Same policies apply to all of the employees whose position is suitable for flexible work arrangements. In both companies, it is also widely acceptable to make use of these policies within the guidelines set by the company or supervisor. To many of the respondents, flexible work arrangements created a sense of trust from the company towards the employees. Also, it was important to several respondents that the supervisors are not constantly hovering over employees while they are working.

Employees who worked for Company B had a finer boundary between work and leisure. However, employees without children from Company A also tended to work sometimes outside of office hours. Hence, several participants stated that the line between work and leisure is sometimes slightly blurred. Nevertheless, none of them felt that they were expected or required to work overtime. In fact, several interviewees stated that they did not see the performing of small work-related tasks, such as replying to e-mails, as work. However, particularly the employees who had children preferred to focus on their family in their free time. Even then, none of the employees interviewed minded to be in turn flexible according to the needs of the company. In fact, many interviewees stated that in their opinion, it was fair that flexibility would apply to both parties.

A comparative matrix (Table 4.) was created to compare the experiences and thoughts of the employees from Company A and Company B:

Table 4.

Interviewee	Company	Flexibility within Work Culture	Implementation	Work-life Conflict	General Impression
3	A	"It's very much dependent on the nature of your work, like in some departments you need to... it's not that flexible and you need to discuss with your supervisor about those things..."	"We have the opportunity for flexible working hours and telecommuting, and then we do have a possibility to, for example, run errands in the middle of the day at the office because of the time cards..."	"I think it depends on whether you have accepted a company mobile phone. I haven't taken it because I don't want to see any emails from work during my free-time... I would like to have a very clear boundary there, like when the workday is over then it's actually over..."	"I think it's good that we have these time cards in use, and what I think is good from the employer's perspective is that they really monitor them [working hours] and whether they're exceeded or not... it creates the feeling that the employer is interested in the staff's well-being."
8	A	"You just basically say to your supervisor that you'll be working from home tomorrow and they let you do that if there are no meetings scheduled here or anything..."	"If [how flexibility is used] is left to your discretion but of course there are instructions about how things are done here and when you should be at work..."	"... of course, there needs to be like an 'emergency line' if something... because there are some functions here which only one person can do or knows about so you have to be able to ask if there are some issues but no, not that much."	"I think they [flexible work arrangements] work very well, no complaints... to me, it's kind of a sign of trust towards the employees when an employer offers these flexible schedules."
9	A	"I think it [flexibility] has worked very well like... like people don't glare at you if you come to work at nine when everyone else comes at eight... these flexible schedules really work in here."	"I can come and go whenever I want if there's no like mandatory thing where I need to be... but as long as things get done, it's the main thing here... so it's left to your discretion to some extent."	"Well... It's a bad habit... to check emails with my phone or iPad at home... But I don't mind because it's just the thing that... when you have that flexibility I don't mind to check or reply to emails in the evenings."	"Well... Maybe... there's flexibility and a sense of trust towards the employees... like, they trust employees to do their job well even if you're not at the office twenty-four seven..."
10	B	"... Basically, if the company is flexible the employee is also flexible, like if you need to work longer someday then you work longer but you can then leave earlier on the next day, so people do understand that..."	"... I can come later and leave later or I can come earlier and leave earlier or leave to do something in the middle of the day... umm... it's maybe a bit funny but we actually haven't talked about it [teleworking] that much, it's been pretty self-evident that teleworking is ok..."	"It's headwork, so it then leads to the fact that... that work follows you in your thoughts when you leave the office..."	"I've liked it [flexibility] because... I usually work from nine to five but it varies a little when I start and finish my workday... but somehow the thought that I need to be somewhere at nine o'clock sharp creates stress... and it creates this feeling that I'm being monitored..."
11	B	"I think people are pretty understanding with that [working overtime] in the sense that... I have never felt that anyone would've pressured me, usually there's always help available..."	"I can start my workday when I want and end it when I want... Like on a monthly basis, I need to have a certain number of working hours... there are some limitations of course, like if I have agreed something with clients..."	"Well not that much... probably because of the fact that I've often had pretty long days so if someone called me after the workday I would then be awake at night... but I do have a clear difference between them [work and leisure]."	"Overall, very positive... it makes you feel really free when you get to decide when you're at the office and so on... Maybe then sometimes there's quite a lot of work in the sense that... well I haven't really experienced that as a negative aspect either..."



## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This discussion and analysis section will contain evaluation of the existing literature and the results from the primary research carried out for this thesis.

### 5.1. Millennials

Sonier (2012) and (Golden, *ibid.*) suggest that it could be critical for companies to promote flexible work arrangements to attract and retain Generation X and Y talent. The findings of this study neither supported nor contradicted this claim: The majority of the interviewees stated that flexibility was not important to them when they applied to their first job after graduation. Nevertheless, many participants stated that they would most likely compare their current position to the next in case they were considering to leave the company in the future.

Millennials are said to value good work-life balance and prefer clearer boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Cogin, 2012; DeVaney, 2015). However, the interviewees had varied opinions regarding this matter. Some interviewees preferred to have more rigid boundaries, particularly those interviewees with caring duties whereas others did not mind performing small duties such as responding to e-mails after the 'office hours' for they experienced that their freer lifestyle enabled them to perform these tasks without interference to their free time.

### 5.2. Work-Life Balance

It is said that flexible work enhances work-life balance (Kelly & Moen, 2007; Hoeven & Zoonen, 2015 Moheet, 2016). The findings of the research conducted for this thesis supported this claim. In fact, the interviewees named the increased ability to make personal plans as one of the main benefits of flexible work arrangements. Hence, in general, flexible work seems to improve work-life balance, particularly in terms of decreasing work-family conflict (Galea et al., 2014). There was no significant evidence of continuous work-life conflict according to the interviewees.

Previous studies suggest that knowledge workers might be expected to be accessible outside of their regular office hours which would result in the blurring of the line between professional and personal life (Golden, 2001; Pedersen & Lewis,

2012; Grant et al., 2014.). However, particularly the employees of Company A did not experience requirements to be within reach after the work day. As stated above, some employees admitted that they read and might respond to work e-mails in their free time but they did it completely voluntarily. Regarding the employees from the Company B, the participants viewed flexibility as a two-way agreement and thus thought it was self-evident and fair to be flexible during more hectic days for they knew they would be compensated when the situation would go back to 'normal'.

It is proposed that Millennials want 'leisure at work' because they do not have to balance between work and family (Ng et al., 2010: 289). Hence, it is suggested that for this generation, work and leisure have merged into one (Schullery, 2013; Johnson, 2015). However, the findings of this study did not support this claim. Even if the boundary between personal and professional life was slightly blurred occasionally, it cannot be concluded that work and leisure would have merged into one entity in the minds of Millennials. As several interviewees stated, recovering mentally from the work day was very important in terms of one's overall well-being.

### 5.3. Flexible Work Arrangements

Several studies have identified flexible working arrangements as one of the most important means to reach a balance between professional and personal life (Smith, 2010). In addition, several studies have found that Millennials want flexible work schedules which enable them to work in their own pace and free of supervision (Twenge, 2010; Schullery, 2013). The findings of this study supported this suggestion: Several interviewees stated that they appreciated the fact that supervisors were not hovering over them at the office. Instead, they felt that the employer trusts that 'the work gets done'. Furthermore, it was appreciated by several interviewees that performance was measured through the results and quality of the work instead of the amount.

Correspondingly, it is said that flexible work schedules would improve employee work-life balance because it gives workers more control over their schedules (Kelly & Moen, 2007; Ronen, 1981 cited in Hayman, 2009: 330; Kelly et al., 2011; Grant, 2013). Indeed, many employees stated that they valued the fact that they are able to

decide when they start and end the work day. According to several interviewees, their motivation to work would decrease if the working hours would be imposed on them by the employer. This is in line with the findings of several already existing studies (Vandeweyer & Glorieux, 2008; cited in Galea et al. 2014 :1093). Furthermore, it is said that employees with stable work hours are more likely to be dissatisfied with their inflexible job schedules. (Golden, 2001)

However, a study by Golden (2001) found that full-time workers with flexible work arrangements often work three or more additional hours weekly in comparison with those who have inflexible schedules. Several interviewees admitted that they were sometimes working overtime, however; they felt no pressure to do so from the employer. Also, some employees stated that they accumulated extra hours when they felt motivated to work. Hence, they could work reduced hours when they needed more free time.

In terms of telecommuting, it is said to reduce commuting time, stress, role overload, and leave more time for leisure (Kossek et al., 2006; cited in Hayman, 2010: 78). However, it is also said that whether the employee was given the opportunity of flexiplace work schedules often depended on the job role of the employee, the level of trust afforded, and the relationship with supervisor (Galea et al., 2013; Grant et al., 2013; Hagel, 2015). The experiences of the employees interviewed for this study did not correspond to this claim. According to the interviewees, same rules applied to everyone if telecommuting was possible considering the duties of a certain position.

Hagel (ibid.) argues that some employees might get more easily distracted and lack the ability to find motivation or feel isolated at home, because they cannot socialize with their co-workers. Nevertheless, none of the employees interviewed had experienced a lack of motivation related to working from home. Instead, one of the reasons why several employees preferred coming to the office instead of working from the home was the fact that they enjoyed socializing with colleagues. It was also stated that help was more easily available at the office.

Furthermore, Grant et al. (2013) found that some employees have too much motivation to work. Hence, they might work extensive hours and neglect relationships outside of work which could eventually weaken their productivity, work-life balance and well-being (Pedersen & Lewis, 2012). The majority of the interviewees did not work overtime when telecommuting. The main reason for this was that the company policies at least in Company A did not allow the employees to report extra hours to the time card system while teleworking.

Finally, a study by Kelly & Moen (2007) suggests that flexible work arrangements should be embedded in the company identity and implemented consistently. However, this does not necessarily mean that the same rules have to apply to everyone as described by several interviewees. Instead, flexible work arrangements should be implemented with regards to the nature of one's duties.

#### 5.4. Limitations of the Study

First, the research was based on a quite small sample of employees from merely two companies. Second, the sample consisted of Millennials only. To address the claims regarding the generational differences in perspectives and attitudes, the sample should have included employees from other generations as well. Finally, the aim of this study was to explore feelings, experiences, and values of Millennials in order to better understand the phenomena described above and perhaps generate hypotheses to be tested in further research. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized for further research is required.

## 6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

### 6.2. Main Findings

In contrast to several studies, the interviewees did not perceive flexibility as an important criterion when they were planning their career or applying to their first position after graduation. However, several employees stated that now that they are accustomed to flexible work arrangements, they might be more important in case they decided to leave their current position at some point of their lives. Furthermore,

the interviewees with caring duties stated that flexibility in work makes their life noticeably easier. In some cases, it might indeed be the factor that enables both parents to pursue both career and family in life.

As suggested in the existing literature, some employees seemed to prefer to maintain a more rigid boundary between work and leisure whereas others did not mind working after the 'office hours'. Indeed, some interviewees preferred to have more strict boundaries. This applied particularly to those interviewees with caring duties whereas others did not mind responding to e-mails after the work day.

One reason to this might be the fact that a freer lifestyle enables the employees to perform small work tasks without much interference to their free time while particularly for employees with young children there might be less blurring between professional and personal lives. Participants with caring duties stated that in their free time, they prefer to focus on their family and not think about work issues. Nonetheless, it might be dangerous to divide Millennials into two distinct groups such as 'office traditionalists' and 'digital freedom crusaders', which were presented in the literature review section, as their opinions may vary over time because of a number of issues such as their current life stage and their motivation to work for the company or in the current position.

Contrary to the suggestions of several existing studies, there was no substantial evidence that leisure and work would have merged into one among Millennials. Indeed, several employees stated that a good work-life balance is very important to them. It appears that to many interviewees, leisure enables them to recover mentally from work and concentrate on other than work-related issues. Thus, it might be dangerous to assume that work and leisure have merged into one to all Millennials as several interviewees preferred to maintain a boundary between the two. However, as stated by the participants, the majority had not experienced any conflicts between work and leisure which would have disturbed their lives thus far.

Moreover, this study found no significant differences in experiences and opinions between the male and female interviewees. Nevertheless, male participants were

more likely to appreciate the fact that flexibility decreases the sense of being monitored by supervisors. Similarly, female respondents were more likely to experience an increase in overall well-being as a result of flexible work arrangements.

In both companies, flexible arrangements were not dependent on the position of the employee in the organization. Instead, flexibility was intertwined within the company culture. Nonetheless, this did not mean that everyone had an equal opportunity for flexible work arrangements as flexibility was provided to the employees whose position or duties enabled flexible work.

Regarding the boundary theory which was first introduced in the literature review section, the results of this study supported the theory. As the boundary theory suggests, all employees seemed to value flexible work arrangements. It appears that flexibility might ease the transition between roles particularly for employees with caring duties. However, several interviewees stated that they did not use flexible arrangements daily or even weekly. Nonetheless, they seemed to appreciate the fact that they were given the opportunity. Furthermore, the results of this study indicate that the provided flexibility decreases stress for the employees for they know that if the train was late in the morning or if they needed to pick up a sick child from kindergarten in the middle of the day, they would be able to do so.

Particularly for employees without family duties, the transition from one role to another might be easier compared to those employees with caring duties. One explanation for this might be their freer lifestyle as their boundaries between the roles might be more flexible and the contrast between roles smaller. Thus, the costs of transferring between roles might also be lower for them.

As suggested above, some employees with and without caring duties preferred to maintain a fixed boundary between work and leisure. Often these employees had worked for the company several years or the nature of the job enabled them to maintain a stricter boundary between their professional and personal lives. As the

boundary theory suggests, transferring from one role to another might be more challenging to these employees and the transition costs might be greater.

### 6.3. Implications for International Business

In 10 years, 75% of the workforce worldwide is estimated to consist of Millennials, the largest generation since Baby Boomers (Johnson, 2015). Hence, it is increasingly important that employers around the world try to understand the needs and preferences of the generation currently entering the workforce. This enables companies to harness the full potential of the Millennial generation. Even though there are differences in values between cultures and individuals, research concerning Millennials can be used to plan and test possible human resource management practices within organizations of all sizes.

### 6.4. Suggestions for Further Research

In the future, conducting research with a larger and more diverse sample might give a more detailed understanding regarding the possible effects of flexible work arrangements on the work-life balance to Millennials. Moreover, the results from one country, for example Finland, should be compared to the results from different countries and cultures. Finally, in order to contribute to the debate regarding the benefits of flexibility to organizations, the company perspective could be included in future studies.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Interviewee demographics

Interviewee number	Birth year	Gender	Civil status	Children	Nationality
1	1990	Female	Cohabiting	No	Finnish
2	1985	Male	Married	Yes	Finnish
3	1988	Female	Single	No	Finnish
4	1990	Male	Single	No	Finnish
5	1985	Male	Married	Yes	Finnish
6	1985	Male	Cohabiting	Yes	Finnish
7	1988	Female	Married	No	Finnish
8	1989	Male	Cohabiting	No	Finnish
9	1990	Male	Cohabiting	No	Finnish
10	1991	Female	Cohabiting	No	Finnish
11	1989	Male	Cohabiting	No	Finnish
12	1990	Male	Cohabiting	No	Finnish
13	1988	Female	Married	No	Indian

